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ABSTRACT

This essay looks at three kinds of changes in American society over the period from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s. First, data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) are used to measure trends in college freshmen's political identification, materialism, concern for law and order, and concern for helping others. In all these measures the paper finds that college freshmen have become more conservative. The paper also examines the fate of various reforms and changes, such as making the liberal arts curriculum more "relevant," making academic rules and regulations more flexible, and allowing students a bigger voice in campus affairs. Again, the paper concludes that these reforms were generally failures. Moving off campus, the paper examines other social and political trends over the same period, noting particularly abortion, recreational drugs, and capital punishment. Here again the trend toward conservatism is clear. Finally, the paper finds the most vivid evidence of conservatism in the mellowing of the prominent rebels and protestors of the late 1960s. It concludes that the times have indeed changed, but not quite in the direction that Bob Dylan predicted! (Contains 30 references.) (CH)

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"The Big Chill: Changes in American Politics and Society from the Late 1960s to the Present"

by

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"'cause the loser now will be later to win, for the
times they are a–changin'."

Bob Dylan

In "Berkeley in the Sixties" (Kitchell 1990), a film about east San Francisco Bay area protesters, both on and off campus, during the late 1960s, Frank Bardacke, a prominent Berkeley radical, excitedly describes what it was like to hitchhike during those years. As the cars passed by, he says, the adults in the front seat would look at him with stony faces, but then the kids in the back seat would press their noses against the rear window and form peace symbols with their fingers. He exults, "we've got the kids on our side, and we can't lose; we just can't lose."

Charles Reich, in The Greening of America, his well–known cri de coeur against the American corporate state, expressed the same idea. In 1970, he wrote about the youth culture of the late 1960s as follows:

> Their protest and rebellion, their culture, clothes, music, drugs, ways of thought and liberated life–style are not a passing fad or a form of dissent and refusal, nor are they in any sense irrational. The whole emerging pattern, from ideals to campus demonstrations to beads and bell bottoms to the Woodstock Festival, makes sense and is part of a consistent philosophy. It is both necessary and inevitable, and in time it will include not only youth, but all people in America. (4)

From the vantage point of the mid–1990s, and with the wisdom provided by hindsight, it is clear that Frank Bardacke and Charles Reich were both dead wrong. America today is far more conservative, both politically and socially, than they and millions of other Americans in the late 1960s would ever have believed could happen. Indeed, to describe the changes in American culture in the last 25 years, a better metaphor than The Greening of America would be "The Big Chill" (Shamberg 1983). In that film, several adults who had been close friends in the 1960s as University of Michigan undergraduates spend the weekend together while attending the funeral of one of their college buddies. They find that most of them have become more materialistic, conventional, and uptight over the years than, back when they were in college, they ever dreamed they could.

This essay discusses changes in American society during the quarter century or so between the late 1960s and the mid–1990s. It examines three kinds of changes: first, trends in college freshmen's political identification, values, and attitudes; second, the fate of various reforms, innovations, and experiments tried on college campuses in the late 1960s and early 1970s, largely in response to student protests; and third, transformations in American politics and society over the last 25 years or so.

COLLEGE FRESHMEN'S VALUES AND ATTITUDES, 1966–1993

The evidence for college freshmen's changes in values and attitudes, 1966–'93, comes from data collected by Alexander W. Astin and his colleagues in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). They administer surveys each fall to a sample of first–time, full–time college freshmen at institutions representative of the nation's four–year colleges and universities and of two–year colleges that offer associate of arts degrees or describe themselves as "terminal vocational" (Dey, Astin, and Korn 1991, 131). The surveys are carefully conducted and analyzed, and they are highly regarded by higher education scholars and administrators.

To show changes in freshmen's values and attitudes over the years, we compare their responses to selected items either in 1966, the first year the survey was conducted, to their responses to the same or a similar, though not identical, item, in 1993. If the item was not included in the 1966 survey, we compare freshmen's responses to it the first year it did appear to their responses in 1993. Their responses show that in many ways college freshmen's values and attitudes shifted, over the years, towards more conservative. (The responses reported below are selected from a larger number of items relating to liberalism and conservatism. Still, after examining freshmen's responses over about a quarter century, [Dey, Astin, and Korn 1991 and "This Year's Freshmen" 1994], it is clear that freshmen's responses to many, though by no means all, items that can be construed as relating to liberal or conservative views show a shift in a conservative direction.) Freshmen's responses to selected items are grouped under four headings,

as follows: political identification; materialism; concern for law and order; and concern for helping others.

Political Identification

In 1970, the first time that this item appeared on the CIRP questionnaire, 37% of all freshmen stated that their present political views were either far left or liberal (Dey, Astin, and Korn 1991, 122); in 1993, only 27% characterized their views as such ("The Year's Freshmen" 1994, A31). (Since all percentages reported on freshmen values and attitudes in the 1960s and early 1970s are from Dey, Astin, and Korn [1991], and all percentages for 1993 are from "This Year's Freshmen" [1994], from now on, in reporting these percentages, we cite page numbers, only.)

Materialism

In response to three separate items dealing with values and attitudes, freshmen gave more materialistic responses in 1993 than they had earlier. In 1966, 44% strongly or somewhat agreed that being very well–off financially was either essential or very important to them (p. 122); by 1993, fully 75% responded that it was (p. A31). In 1971, 50% agreed that a very important reason in deciding to go to college was to be able to make more money (p. 112); in 1993, 75% gave this response (p. A31). In 1971, 74% indicated that a very important reason why they decided to go to college was to be able to get a better job (p. 112); in 1993, 82% gave this as a very important reason (p. A31).

Concern for Law and Order

In their responses to items relating to "law and order," freshmen generally changed, over the years, to more conservative views. In 1968, only 19% strongly or somewhat agreed that marijuana should be legalized, but the proportion thinking so increased to 38% in 1970 and to 39% in 1971, and it stayed at 46% or higher throughout the rest of the decade (p. 124); in 1993, only 28% thought that marijuana should be legalized (p. A31). In 1969, 54% thought that there was too much concern in the courts for the rights of criminals (p. 124); in 1993, 68% did (p. A31). In

1969, 54% thought that capital punishment should be abolished (p. 124); in 1993, only 22% thought so (p. A31).

Concern for Helping Others

Freshmen, in their responses to three different items, were more concerned with helping others in the late 1960s and early 1970s than they had been in 1993. In 1966, 69% thought that it was essential or very important to help others in difficulty (p. 122); in 1993, only 64% thought so (p. A31). In 1970, 29% thought it was essential or very important to participate in a community action program (p. 122); in 1993, only 26% did. In 1971, 43% thought it was essential or very important to become involved in programs to clean up the environment (p. 122); in 1993, only 29% did (p. A31).

THE FAILURE OF EDUCATIONAL REFORMS, INNOVATIONS, AND EXPERIMENTS

The late 1960s were years of unprecedented student protests on college campuses. While many of the protests involved issues that stretched far beyond campus, such as civil rights for blacks, environmental pollution, and the Vietnam War, many other student protests in the 1960s and early 1970s focussed on campus matters (Astin, Astin, Bayer, and Bisconti 1975, 38–40). The two most bitter and prolonged student revolts of the 1960s — the Free Speech Movement, beginning in 1964 at the University of California/Berkeley, and the protests, originally over the location of a new gym, that began at Columbia University in 1968, both involved, at the outset, local issues. In response to student protests, hundreds of colleges and universities, including many that had not been the scene of student protests, initiated educational reforms, innovations, and experiments in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Today, many or most of them have ended or been sharply curtailed. We consider below three types of reform that have been largely unsuccessful: making the liberal arts curriculum more "relevant"; making academic rules, regulations, and requirements more flexible; and allowing students a bigger voice in campus affairs.

Making the Liberal Arts Curriculum More "Relevant"

The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed, in many fields, either the beginning or a great increase in the number of "relevant" courses, programs, and majors in the liberal arts curriculum — in such areas, for example, as black and various other kinds of ethnic studies, women's studies, environmental studies, and even peace studies. While women's studies courses, programs, and majors have continued to proliferate ever since, most of the others have not. Probably a smaller proportion of American college students take courses in black studies, environmental studies, and the others today than did so in the early 1970s.

Two other attempts of the late 1960s to make the liberal arts curriculum more "relevant" have since disappeared or almost disappeared. These are experimental colleges and programs, usually located near traditional colleges and universities (Grant and Riesman 1978, 187–188), and teach–ins.

Making Academic Rules, Regulations, and Requirements More Flexible

Many efforts were initiated in the late 1960s and early 1970s to make academic rules, regulations, and requirements more flexible than they had been. They included the following: permitting students to take courses under the pass/no credit option; letting students drop courses until very late in the semester; giving students academic credit for "life experiences" they had had before attending college; requiring fewer courses and sequences, especially in disciplines outside the physical and biological sciences; "sanitized" transcripts, on which no failing grades were recorded; and "individual" majors, designed by students.

Allowing Students a Bigger Voice in Campus Affairs

In the wake of the student protests of the late 1960s, campuses responded in many ways to give students a bigger voice than before in campus affairs. These included providing for students to serve, either by election or appointment, on various department or campus–wide committees, to the academic senate, and sometimes to the institution's governing board. Occasionally, students even got the right to vote on whether prospective faculty members should be appointed and current

faculty members should receive tenure. These reforms have either ended or been greatly curtailed at many or most of the campuses that introduced them.

Those most familiar with American higher education have generally agreed that many of the campus reforms of the late 1960s and early 1970s were failures. Gerald Grant and David Riesman wrote in The Perpetual Dream that "what in the 1960s seemed to many idealists (both student and faculty), as worth trying often appears a decade or so later to be fruitless if not destructive" (p. 5). In the same vein, Clark Kerr wrote that in the 1960s and 1970s American research universities attempted three kinds of fundamental reform: "academic reform"; "reconstitution of the university into a direct agent of social reform"; and "changes in governance." He concluded that these three fundamental changes attempted over the past twenty years had "largely failed" (Kerr 1982, 180).

AMERICAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY

America is clearly more conservative, both politically and socially, in the mid–1990s than it was in the late 1960s. During most of the 1960s, two liberal Democrats, John F. Kennedy (1961–'63) and Lyndon Johnson (1963–'69) served as president. In 19 of the 26 years since 1969, Republicans have been president: Richard Nixon (1969–'74); Gerald Ford (1974–'77); Ronald Reagan (1981–'89); and George Bush (1989–'93). Only from 1977–'81, under Jimmy Cartter, and since 1993, under Bill Clinton, has America had Democratic presidents, and both have been moderate, rather than liberal, Democrats.

The more conservative cast of American presidents since 1968 reflects the increasing political conservatism of the nation as a whole. According to Caplow, Bahr, Modell, and Chadwick, in Recent Social Trends in the United States, 1960–1990 (1991):

> Pollsters regularly ask Americans how they would place themselves along a liberal– conservative continuum. From 1940 through roughly the mid–1960s, the proportions were about equal, with the conservative side gaining somewhat more support than the

> liberal....Since the mid–1960s, however, in the public at large there has been a marked increase in the proportions identifying themselves as relatively conservative, a finding replicated in four separate poll series. (337–338)

Abortion, Illegal Recreational Drugs, and Capital Punishment

On a variety of public policy matters, including abortion, the use of marijuana and other illegal recreational drugs, and capital punishment, America has turned more conservative over the last quarter century. One of the major goals of the fledgling women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s was for women to receive abortions on demand. Its hopes were largely realized in the United States Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision (1973). In it, the Court held, by the lopsided vote of 7–2, that states did not have the right to restrict abortions during the first trimester of pregnancy and that they could regulate, but not prohibit, abortions during the second trimester. Since that landmark decision, however, the Court has made more than one ruling which erodes women's rights to abortion conferred by Roe v. Wade, most notably Webster v. Missouri Reproductive Health Services (1989) and Rust v. Sullivan (1990).

In the former, the Court ruled that "some state–imposed restrictions on abortion are constitutionally permissible" (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992, 3). In the latter

> ...the Court ruled that the executive branch could interpret a law forbidding family planning clinics that accept federal funds from performing abortions to also forbid doctors at those clinics from discussing abortion with their patients. The Court rejected arguments that these executive interpretations violated the constitutional freedom of speech of health care providers in these clinics. (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992, 197)

Undercutting its Roe v. Wade decision even further, in 1993 the Court decided that "federal judges cannot stop protesters who try to block women's access to abortion clinics...." ("Abortion

Blockades" 1993, A1).

Many state legislatures, as well, have chipped away at the reproductive rights that Roe v. Wade gave women. From 1973 to 1989, 15 states passed nine or more statutes restricting women's rights to an abortion conferred by Roe v. Wade, and another 12 states passed from five to eight statutes restricting these rights (Halva–Neubauer 1993, Table 10.1, 173).

Partly as the result of the various restrictions on women's rights to obtain an abortion that have been placed, since Roe v. Wade, by U.S. Supreme Court decisions and state legislatures, in 1992, according to a survey taken by the Allan Guttmacher Institute, the number of abortions performed in the United States dropped to about 1.53 million. That was the lowest figure recorded since 1979 ("U.S. Abortion Rate" 1994).

Americans have become more conservative, over the years, in their use of marijuana and other generally illegal recreational drugs, as well. In the late 1960s, as the use of marijuana and other illegal recreational drugs increased sharply among young people, many Americans thought that before very long, marijuana and perhaps some other illicit drugs would be legalized throughout America. In the San Francisco Bay area, it was widely rumored at the time that a major cigarette manufacturer had obtained a trademark on the phrase, "Acapulco Gold," and planned to use it as the brand name for its line of marijuana cigarettes when marijuana became legal. Eventually, eleven states legalized the possession of small quantities of marijuana (Thies and Register 1993, 385). The number of people using marijuana rose steadily from the mid– 1960s until it reached a peak in about 1980; however, after then, the use of illicit drugs declined steadily until about 1991. In that year, the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research reported as follows:

> ...over the last ten years there have been appreciable declines in the use of a number of the illicit drugs among [high school] seniors, and even larger declines in their use among American college students and young adults generally (emphasis theirs). (Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman 1991, 12)

The authors of Recent Social Trends in the United States, 1960–1990 found that with the exception of users of cocaine, whose numbers had more than doubled since 1980, and heroin users, whose numbers had remained unchanged since 1980:

> Slowly, very slowly, the consumption of mood–changing substances seems to be declining in the United States. Since 1980, the regular use of marijuana, stimulants, tranquilizers, sedatives, barbiturates, hallucinogens, alcohol, and tobacco has declined, particularly among young adults. (Caplow, Bahr, Modell, and Chadwick 1991, 512)

The use of illicit drugs, from about 1980 to about 1991, declined not only among youth but among all age groups, as the following passage shows:

> A series of household surveys undertaken by the National Institute on Drug Abuse at intervals of from one to three years between 1971 and 1991 demonstrates that, for all age groups, drug abuse peaked around 1979 and has been declining ever since. In fact, between 1985 and 1991 the number of current drug users among Americans aged 12 and over (determined by those surveyed who acknowledged using an illicit drug at least once within the last thirty days) declined by half. (Hanson 1991, 151–152)

There is evidence that the use of marijuana, after declining steadily for more than a decade, started to rise in 1992 among eighth graders and high school students ("Teen–Age Smoking" 1994, 1), and also among college students ("Students' Drug Use" 1993). Nevertheless, Americans of all ages' use of illicit, recreational drugs remains much lower in the mid–1990s than it was c. 1980, and far lower than a great many Americans, during the late 1960s, would have predicted it would be today.

In capital punishment, too, America has swung, during the past two decades or so, to a more conservative position. As with abortion, on which the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark liberal decision in the early 1970s that has since been eroded both by subsequent Court decisions and state legislatures, the same has happened with capital punishment. In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty, as it was then meted out, was unconstitutional, on the grounds that it was not applied uniformly and was not limited to specifically named crimes. By 1976, enough states had rewritten their laws to specify the particular crimes for which the death penalty would be imposed that the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty, so long as it was not the mandatory punishment for any crime. From 1977, when the first round of executions was held, to July, 1994, some 245 prisoners were executed (Gest 1994, 31).

Protesters of the Late 1960s

Nowhere can "The Big Chill" in American society be seen more vividly than in the later activities of some of America's most prominent rebels and protesters of the late 1960s. Many of them have turned to surprising new pursuits. For example, Jerry Rubin, who along with cofounder of the Black Panther Party Bobby Seale, Abbie Hoffman, Tom Hayden, and others was one of the famous Chicago Seven conspirators on trial in 1969–'70, as of 1989 had "renounced radicalism to become a Wall Street marketing director and now a Manhattan nightclub promoter" (Kunen 1989, 107). Bobby Seale, for his part, has authored a cookbook, "Barbecue'n with Bobby" ("Then and Now" 1993). H. Rap Brown, former leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, has become a man of the cloth; he is now known as Jamil Abdullah Al–Amin, head of the Atlanta, Georgia Community Mosque ("Then and Now" 1993). Jane Fonda, widely known as Hanoi Jane during the late 1960s for her support, during the Vietnam War, of North Vietnam, is now married to Ted Turner, owner of Turner Broadcasting System, and one of the thirty or so richest people in America ("The Forbes Four Hundred" 1993, 124– 125). She produces best–selling exercise videos and was rated the number one heroine of young Americans in a 1985 U.S. News & World Report Roper poll and the fourth most admired woman

in America in a Ladies Home Journal Roper poll the same year (Who's Who in America 1993, 1130).

David Horowitz and Peter Collier, San Francisco Bay area radicals of the late 1960s and early 1970s and editors of the leftwing magazine, Ramparts, during the same period, have both moved from far Left to far Right. Some of their many Left–bashing articles and speeches have been collected in their Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts about the '60s (Collier and Horowitz 1989) and Deconstructing the Left: From Vietnam to the Persian Gulf (Collier and Horowitz 1991). Some political icons of the late 1960s counter culture recently posed for an advertisement of Ben & Jerry's ice cream in Time, as Newsweek frostily observed in an article titled, "The Big Chill" (Nayyar 1994). Bobby Seale is pictured clasping a pint of vanilla ice cream close to his heart; Daniel Berrigan, the radical priest who was jailed in the early 1970s for his acts opposing the war in Vietnam, is shown, eyes closed in apparent ecstasy, holding aloft a heaping dish of mocha fudge ("Introducing Ben & Jerry's" 1994).

Easily the most popular American singer of the 1960s counter culture was Bob Dylan, who wrote of the changes sweeping over America in such songs as "Blowin' in the Wind" (1962), "The Times They are A–Changin'" (1963), "Maggie's Farm," (1965), and "The Ballad of a Thin Man" (1965), with its famous refrain, "...something is happening here, but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?" Since the 1960s, he has continued to compose songs, make records, and tour, but his music has undergone some astonishing changes, the most notable of which was the result of his conversion to Christianity. In 1978 Dylan "accepted Jesus" (Shelton 1986, 483), and in 1980 he asked a minister to come on the road with him and his band, "to lead in prayer and Bible study and to minister to him personally" (Shelton 1986, 486).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he composed and sang blatantly fundamentalist Christian songs. During this period, he was frequently booed, in concert appearances, by his former fans. In short order, he recorded three albums containing songs with Christian fundamentalist themes — "Slow Train Coming" (1979); "Saved" (1980); and "Shot of Love" (1981). In the early 1990s, he

is said to have turned to orthodox Judaism and to have intensely studied the Talmud. In 1994, Dylan even went so far as to let the establishment Big Six accounting firm, Coopers & Lybrand, use "The Times They Are A–Changin'," sung by Richie Havens, in a television advertisement ("Just in Case" 1994).

Finally, as if to support the truth of Karl Marx's reworking of Hegel's famous observation to the effect that "all great world– historic facts...appear, so to speak, twice....the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce" (Bartlett 1992, 481), Timothy Leary, who frequently found himself on the wrong side of the law in the 1960s for using LSD, was recently arrested at the Austin, Texas airport for the infraction of smoking a cigarette ("'60s Guru Arrested" 1994).

CONCLUSION

As of the late 1960s, millions of Americans, both young and old, hoped for and even expected that before very long, America would undergo what one song of the time called "the dawning of the age of Aquarius" — an age when, if not everyone turned on, turned in, and dropped out, still many of the ideals of the youth counterculture of the '60s would prevail. Instead, the opposite has happened — both the campus and American society as a whole have become more conservative, politically and socially, than most people could possibly have foreseen a quarter century ago. The nation's campuses, the scene of so many rebellions in the late 1960s, have been virtually without a major protest in more than twenty years. America has been led, for more than 25 years, not by liberal Democratic presidents, but by Republicans and moderate Democrats. The times have, indeed, changed, but not in the way that Bob Dylan's song, "The Times They are A–Changin'," predicted.

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